

Dear Mr. John Hampton,

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I understand that bill 6725, AN ACT CONCERNING ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY SERVICES was introduced on Feb. 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015 by the Joint Committee on Children. I ask for your continued support of this bill which would greatly benefit the people of the state of CT.

My boyfriend's nieces Meghan & Paige Tarpey, whom I consider my own nieces, were involved in the incident at Sandy Hook Elementary on December 14, 2012. Paige, the youngest, was in the first grade and witnessed her beloved teacher and friends have their lives stolen from them far too soon. Our imaginations can't even get close to the horror that the surviving children and families continue to experience every day. Almost immediately, "therapy dogs" rushed to their aid and continue to visit these children as often as possible. Paige will never be the same innocent little girl every again. Talking about what happened remains to be a task in which she avoids. However, the dogs that have come to her aid know more details than we ever may. They offer a warm fuzzy body to cry on and an open ear for the children's secrets and nightmares. The dogs were the ONLY reason Paige was willing to return to school. These dogs patiently and amazingly let the children pour their emotional and mental trauma out while wagging, licking and hugging. Paige became so reliant on these dogs for therapy, she actually collected trading cards of the dogs which enabled some cheerful play between her and the other surviving victims. Paige looks forward to her scheduled "walk" around the school with one of the therapy dogs that still comes to see her each Monday. Paige has been titled an "honorary handler".



There is no shortage on information available on the benefits of animal therapy for children with autism, Down's Syndrome, PTSD and depression, among others. Horses in particular seem to have an affinity for healing effects on youth and adults. Horses have been proven to assist with trust, boundaries, self-acceptance, spiritual connections, impulse control and communication. I personally have horses to thank for giving me the strength to save myself from an abusive relationship years ago. The impact of horses on my well-being was so strong that I rescued my own horse who continues to give me some sort of therapy on a daily basis.

I understand that there is opposition from people claiming that animal therapy is exploitation of animals. However, if this bill passes and succeeds to create more efficiency in the provision of animal-assisted therapy services, these concerns would be addressed. Concerns include the following:

- Injuries from rough handling or from other animals may occur
- Basic animal welfare cannot be assured (this includes veterinary care and access to water and exercise areas)
- An animal may not enjoy visiting

Animals need protection and specific provisions would ensure this. A proposed code I researched suggests the following:

- The animal's welfare must be the priority of the therapy facilitator
- The therapy animal must "never be forced to leave the home to go to work" or to perform actions that it is reluctant to perform
- Animals are to be given adjustment time and quiet time periods before sessions and be protected from individuals carrying diseases that may be transmitted to them

AAT should also be delivered or directed by a professional health or human service provider who demonstrates skill and expertise regarding the clinical applications of human-animal interactions.

There is also concern as to the type of animal that is certified in AAT. Concerns exist about the use of wild animals such as dolphins, monkeys, etc. that are trained outside of their normal environment to fulfill a human need. AAT can be achieved through dogs, horses, cats, rabbits and other small animals who would not have natural habitat and behavior taken from them in order to be certified therapy animals.

In addition, I understand that there is concern over the short vs long term impact of AAT. I believe this topic is not one of concern, as I believe that short OR long term assistance with AAT is effective and rewarding for both the patient and their family.

Recognizing animals for therapy assistance, providing proper training and licensure by handlers, and implementing critical incident response teams will benefit the children and the families of CT that have undergone physical, mental and emotional trauma to a degree beyond measure. Passing a bill encourages proper training of handlers and animals, to ensure the safety and handling of each. Passing a bill may also encourage recognition from those that currently do not understand the beneficial nature of animal-assisted therapy.

**"A pet is an island of sanity in what appears to be an insane world. Friendship retains its traditional values and securities in one's relationship with one's pet. Whether a dog, cat,**

**bird, fish, turtle, or what have you, one can rely upon the fact that one's pet will always remain a faithful, intimate, non-competitive friend, regardless of the good or ill fortune life brings us."** ... quote from American child psychologist Dr. Boris Levinson

Thank you for your time,

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proposed code and concerns: Tzachi Zamir, The Moral Basis of Animal-Assisted Therapy, Society & Animals 14:2 (2006) © Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2006 -

[https://www.animalsandsociety.org/assets/library/610\\_moralsofanimalassistedthe.pdf](https://www.animalsandsociety.org/assets/library/610_moralsofanimalassistedthe.pdf)

<http://www.goodtherapy.org/animal-assisted-therapy.html#>

<http://psychcentral.com/lib/the-truth-about-animal-assisted-therapy/00010295>

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/278173.php>